

#####  
#####

Hockey Australia  
**LEVEL 3 NCAS COURSE**  
Canberra, Dec. 1993

DISCUSSION TOPIC

# Designer Games

Richard Charlesworth

#####  
#####

## DESIGNER GAMES

### INTRODUCTION

The challenge for all coaches is to provide an environment in which tactical, technical, psychological, competitive and physical skills can be nurtured optimally. Where athletes aren't full time, this requires "chunking" of many of these aspects together in order to efficiently utilize the limited time available.

While specialized and individual skill sessions can achieve much we must remember always that hockey is a team game requiring interactions of a complex and often confusing nature. These interactions occur between team mates and opponents and it is difficult to reproduce realistic interactions on the training track.

Chunking that is often an economical necessity can provide the best situation to simulate match conditions. Such situations have the added advantage of putting fun into training while honing skills and specifying the fitness requirement of the coach. In the following pages I will outline how many of these objectives can be satisfied by utilizing the DESIGNER GAME.

Designer games can be constructed specifically and with imagination to conform with the aims of the coach and the requirements of the training phase. There are a large number of variables which can be manipulated to satisfy those aims.

### WHAT IS A DESIGNER GAME?

Principally it is a contest between teams in which a result (win/loss) is sought. The teams must strive to win while the game and design allows particular emphasis on aspects of hockey-craft in that competitive environment.

It is distinct from a 1 on 1 situation or other drills which endeavour to simulate match situations. It entails teams trying to win unlike flow exercises, tackling box exercises, channelling drills with 2 on 3 or 3 on 4 and various other practice techniques.

While the designer game can be played in a small area it is not generally a small game situation and from my experience the most realistic results can be obtained by using larger areas or the full field. Equally, these games can be constructed to include the Goalkeepers playing in their circle to accurately simulate match conditions (See diagram No 1). Where goalkeepers are otherwise occupied then smaller goals are employed.

A variety of games can be constructed by manipulating the following parameters:

1. Number of players and number of teams
2. Shape and size of the Pitch
3. Number, size and type of goals and scoring rules
4. Special rules eg - must pass forward
  - "silence"
  - no go zones

#### 1. NUMBER OF PLAYERS AND NUMBER OF TEAMS:

Any situation where the score is kept and there are four or more players can qualify for Designer Game status. It must entail situations where both teams have passing options (1 on 1 and 1 on 2 situations do not afford this opportunity).

Ideally teams of three or more will participate allowing for more variety and as many as 30 players could be accommodated on the full pitch.

Two or three teams can participate. Where four teams are used the degree of complexity can cause extreme confusion and alliance building can become too difficult. However, in a four goal, four team match where teams can share the scoring and defend their own goal territory then a 4 team option is feasible. Theoretically even more teams could be used but my experience of any more than three is not encouraging!!

#### 2. THE SHAPE AND SIZE OF THE PITCH:

This is often determined by the squad size and training environment. Equally the requirements of the coach regarding fitness outcomes can drive this decision.

From the traditional rectangular shape to squares, triangles to circles and a hexagon there are no limitations. The goals are generally placed on the perimeter but scoring "gates" or "boxes" may be inside the perimeter. Also if a free flowing aerobic game is desired it is often best to allow scoring from both sides of the goal and to ignore the perimeter and pursue a "play on everywhere" approach.

### 3. NUMBER, SIZE AND TYPE OF GOALS & SCORING RULES:

Here the possibilities are legion. While more than four formal goals can be too confusing the use of scoring gates and boxes can provide even more options and stimulate inventiveness and flexibility.

Importantly normal goals can be used housing a goalkeeper or a variety of small goals, gates, boxes and targets can be utilized. Scoring can be via the traditional method or crossing the line, possession within an area, hitting a target or some special rule. Possession of the ball for a period of time, a number of tackles for possession or a number of possession passes are all examples of possibilities.

### 4. SPECIAL RULES:

These can be utilized to emphasise the specific objectives of the coach. They can apply globally (to all players) or even be restricted to particular individuals or teams. "Silence", obligatory forward passing or tracking or no go zones are all examples of such rules. The use of these rules enables specific focus on such things as penetration, searching skills or option taking.

### WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED?

#### A. GENERAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Globally the gains are in the areas of fitness, transition, strategic judgement and prioritization, teamwork, competitive toughness and playreading.

Some specific gains are outlined in B.

#### Strategic Judgement

Any situation with more than two goals or more than one way of scoring, elusive boundaries, different rules yet competitive opponents is "unusual". As such it requires heightened risk assessments in both attack and defence. Strategic judgement and tactical option selection are tested and horizons lifted.

### Fitness

Because teams can be overloaded by varying numbers or providing more difficult scoring tasks, the fitness objectives can be achieved. Rotation of such stresses can share the load amongst the whole group. Using heart rate monitors and simple pulse checks we can confirm the likely fitness training effect of our sessions. Clearly the specificity of any anaerobic or aerobic gains is likely to be appropriate for hockey!

### Teamwork

The forming of alliances (as in a three team game) and the judging of risk is enhanced in these matches. Unless there is a recognition of the team aim (to win) then the difficulty of the task will be overwhelming. Likewise the sharing of the score in the three team game should accentuate the need for co-operation. Rarely can specialized skill sessions match the chaotic reality that is match play. The designer game reinforces this critical but rarely acknowledged aspect of hockey craft.

### Transition

Probably the most consistent gain in all these situations is in the area of transition. In my view perhaps the most critical aspect of real game situations is best catered for in competitive designer games as play doesn't stop until a goal is scored. In too many artificial training drills there is "a relaxation phase" which the competitive game does not allow. The metamorphosis from defender to attacker and back again is continuous and unrelenting and cannot be given enough emphasis.

### Competitive Toughness

Recent feedback from the senior Australian Women's team revealed a desire for even more competitive training situations. Designer games were undertaken with relish and enthusiasm. Keeping the score and good natured rivalry ensured tempo and commitment to the tasks set.

Overloading via player numbers, fatigue, task difficulty etc, could be manipulated so as to require players to compete under stress and learn to never yield. The complexity of the situation and the physical demands added to the win/loss scenario ensured stresses similar to match conditions.

### Playreading

It is an interesting exercise to stop the game and question teams about what is going on. Often I will instruct one team to play a particular way and wait to see how long their opponents take to work out what is happening. Such questioning stimulates players to be more analytical during the game and over time this more critical demeanour can become the norm!

### **B. SPECIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS**

There are many ways in which particular elements of hockey skill can be taught and practiced. However, it is my contention that at the elite level such elements can only be considered finalized when they are introduced into match play. As players often do not have the confidence or opportunity to practice or experiment in club situations the designer game affords the ideal opportunity to master such elements.

I will endeavour to outline a handful of elements which can be given specific emphasis in the game situation while at the same time the players benefit in a global way as outlined above. The particular elements on which I will focus are:

- . PENETRATION
- . DRIBBLING & TACKLING FOR POSSESSION
- . SCANNING OR SEARCHING SKILLS
- . GOALSCORING AND CIRCLE DEFENCE

#### PENETRATION

This can be emphasised by requiring players to make forward passes. This "special rule" requires players to make penetrating leads and do superior preparation when anticipating a team mate gaining possession. Both the leading and passing are reinforced and emphasised. The principle can be introduced gently by initially requiring only every second pass to be forward but once mastered the more difficult task can be pursued.

In my view nothing distinguishes us more from our European opponents than our capacity to penetrate with incisive passing. Indeed a short session in which no forward passes are allowed, quickly reinforces the need for such offensive capacity!

Diagram 1 outlines a game where the penetrating pass can be included in practice which includes a goalkeeper and goal scoring chances. Two equal teams start facing one another on the 25 and half line with the players on the half line having possession. Only offensive players can cross the 25 before the ball does and once in possession they must then attempt to score against the goalkeeper while the defenders attempt to repair the damage. Each team gets equal opportunity as both attackers and defenders can benefit from this emphasis. Of course the pass giver by searching ahead for the pass is also being required to work on that aspect of their game so the special rule achieves other benefits also.

Another situation which emphasises penetration is the no go zone game described in Diagram 2. Here two equal teams of players are located at opposite ends of the pitch. In the middle we mark out a "no go zone" which is out of bounds to both teams. Each team has a spare - off the pitch player at each end who rotates on and off to give numerical advantage whenever his/her team has the ball.

Teams score half a point by making a pass which crosses the "no go zone" to find a leading player from their team on the other side. Once gaining possession another half a point can be obtained my making it over the end zone.

This game requires penetrating, accurate passes to quickly cross the midfield zone to find their mark. An overhead that succeeds without touching the "no go zone" earns a full point but of course is harder to perform and easier to defend against! By continually rotating the extra players each time the ball goes to the other end the tempo can be maintained effectively and all players are utilized.

#### DRIBBLING AND TACKLING FOR POSSESSION

Playing games where the ball must be passed first time emphasize the benefits of the ball changing direction quickly as it is moved on to another player. The contrary effect can be achieved by requiring that every play must track with the ball for at least 5 metres before passing. This encourages running with the ball to possess or take on opponents and equally reinforces tackling and channelling skills in the opposition. Half a point can be scored for every clear elimination.

A game played in three thirds whereby the teams play "one touch", "must track with ball" and "normal" can in a very practical way demonstrate to the players the advantages and disadvantages of each situation.

### SCANNING, SEARCHING SKILLS

Talking for information and encouragement is an essential part of team play. Players should be constantly expected to participate and being involved is continually reinforced. However, by blotting out the verbal communication mode via enforced silence or the use of earmuffs, players are forced to concentrate and search much more for the non-verbal cues. "Head up" searching or scanning skills are emphasized and early preparation becomes even more crucial in both attack and defence. According to whether all players or just one team or selected individuals are targetted the coach is able to modify the game parameters.

Another way in which searching and preparation are heightened is by numbering the players of one team and requiring them to count up in sequence as the ball passes between them. (ie from 2 to 3 to 4 to 5 etc). This variation requires special attention to be made by those leading to become available in their turn. Physically it can be very demanding especially if opponents are aware of the requirement.

Equally a three team game (Diagram 3) requires emphasis on searching or "head up" play as one must constantly decide on the best point of attack and differentiate enemy from friend.

### GOALSCORING AND CIRCLE DEFENCE

This game (Diagram 4) gives an example of how a goalkeeper can be accommodated into a design game in which goal shots free hits and corners are all part of the action. Four to six attackers try to score against the goalkeeper and three to five defenders inside the 25 yd. A goal for the attackers is scored by beating the keeper but additionally a 5 metre gate where each circle meets the backline allows the attackers to score a half point if they can penetrate through that area. Similarly a corner earnt is worth half a point. Additionally rebound nets at each side of the goal provide for many interesting "play on" situations stimulating alertness and follow up by attackers.

The defence however, can also score via the gates on the 25 or via passing directly to any of a number of targets which if hit directly attract half a point. Also any overhead which is not dangerous and clears the half line earns half a point. 16 yard hits require the goalkeeper to deal with a "pass back" with all other players outside the circle to start. Again an interesting challenge!

### EQUIPMENT

Most of these games can be constructed using very simple equipment such as cones, goals, numbered coloured bibs and utilizing existing markings. However, velcro ground marking tape, ear muffs, targets and rebound screens may require some expense or improvisation. No doubt given time many more ideas can be generated!

### CONCLUSION

A great variety of possibilities exist for establishing an interesting training environment which economically utilizes the time available. Designer games are in my view one of the best. Diagram 5 outlines a full field situation which can easily occupy your whole squad. It is outlined to indicate how these games can fit in between the scratch match and small game.

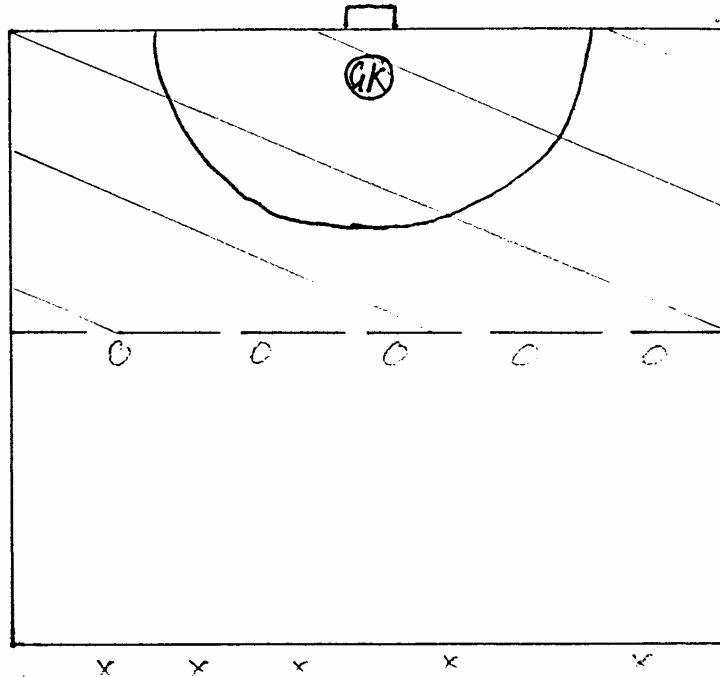
Any number of training drills can emphasize skills and/or provide physically taxing tasks at the same time. However, few offer the continuity of the designer game and none provide the competitive, strategic, distracted and "decision-laden" environment in which to do it. That is why these situations are found to be challenging and fun by players. Many comment that its almost "not like hockey training".

It is my hope that the options and few ideas which I have presented will stimulate discussion to further expand the possibilities for even more interesting designer games.

RICHARD CHARLESWORTH

11

# PENETRATION I

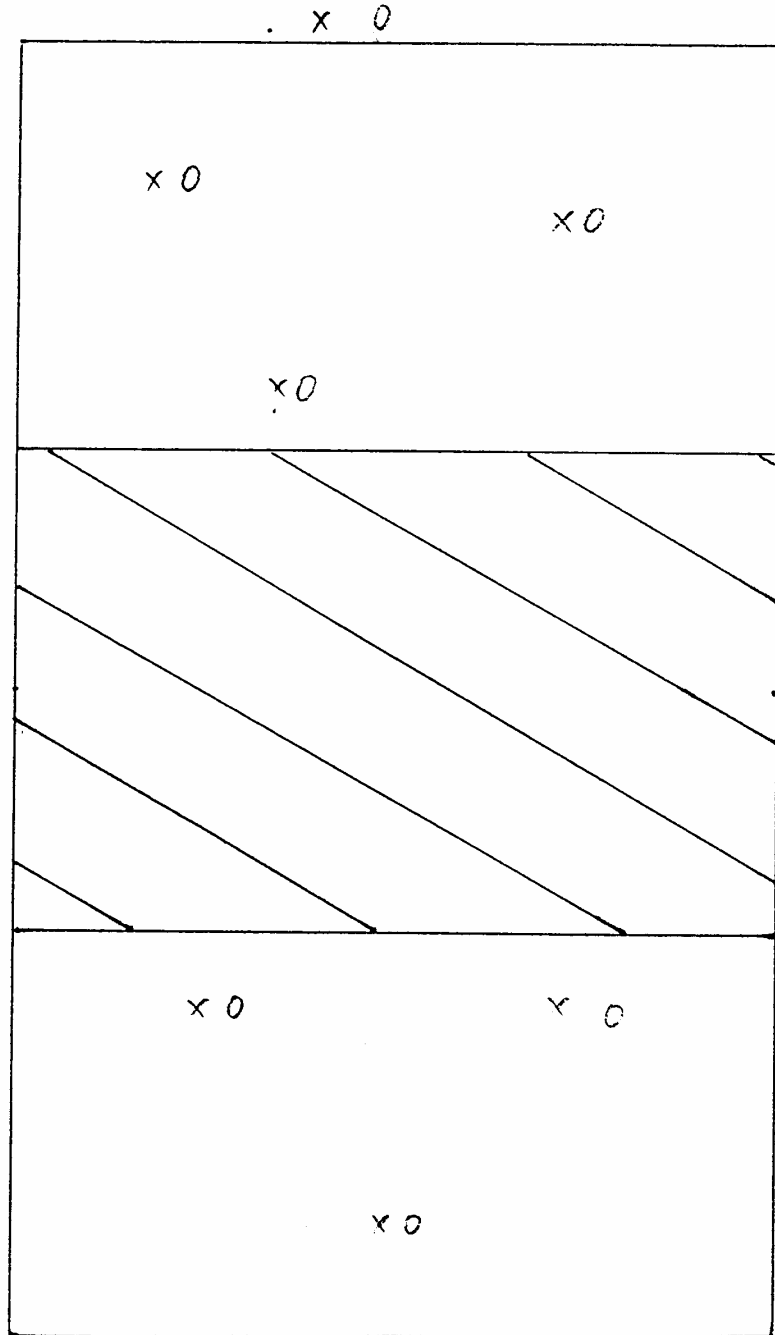


ONLY ENTRY  
BY DEFENDERS  
ONCE BALL IN  
ZONE.

STARTING  
POSITIONS

2

# PENETRATION II

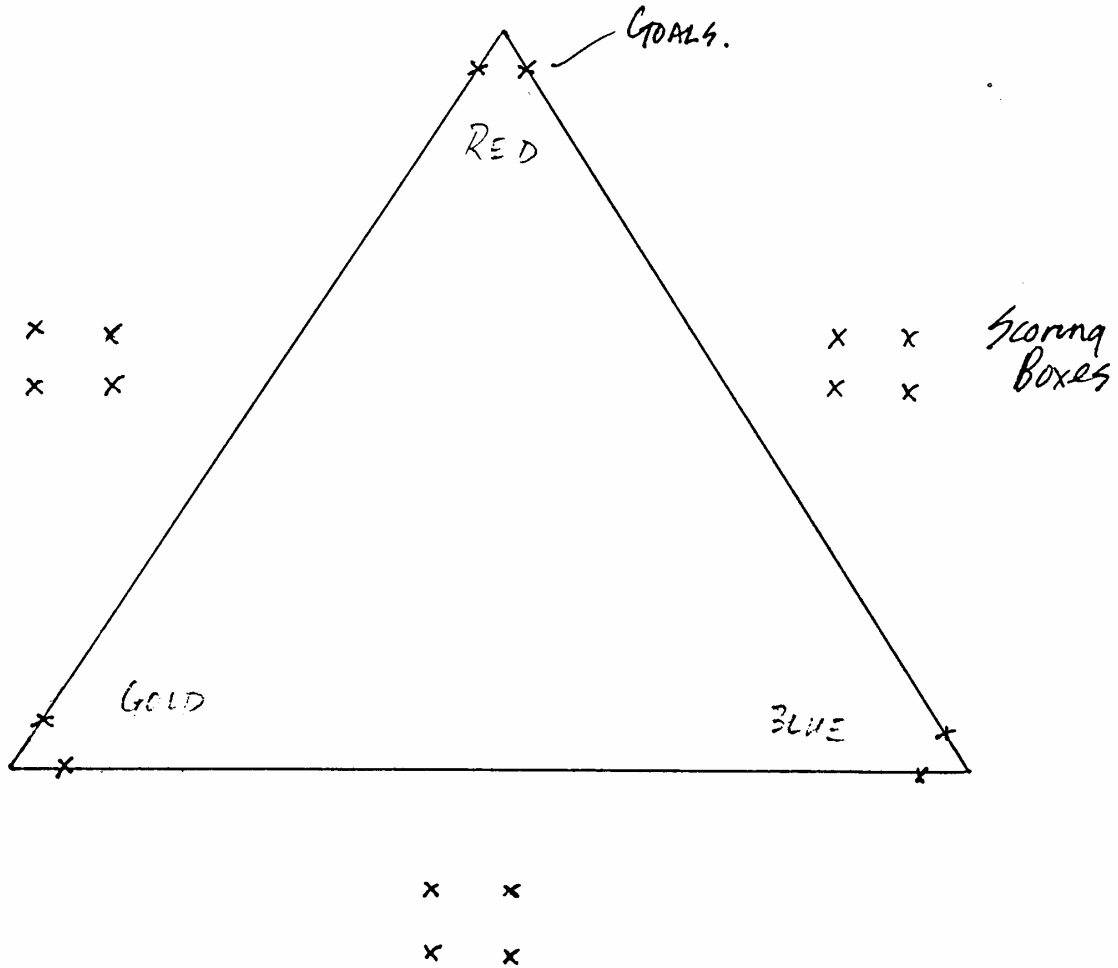


"No go zone"  
(variable distance)

x0

3

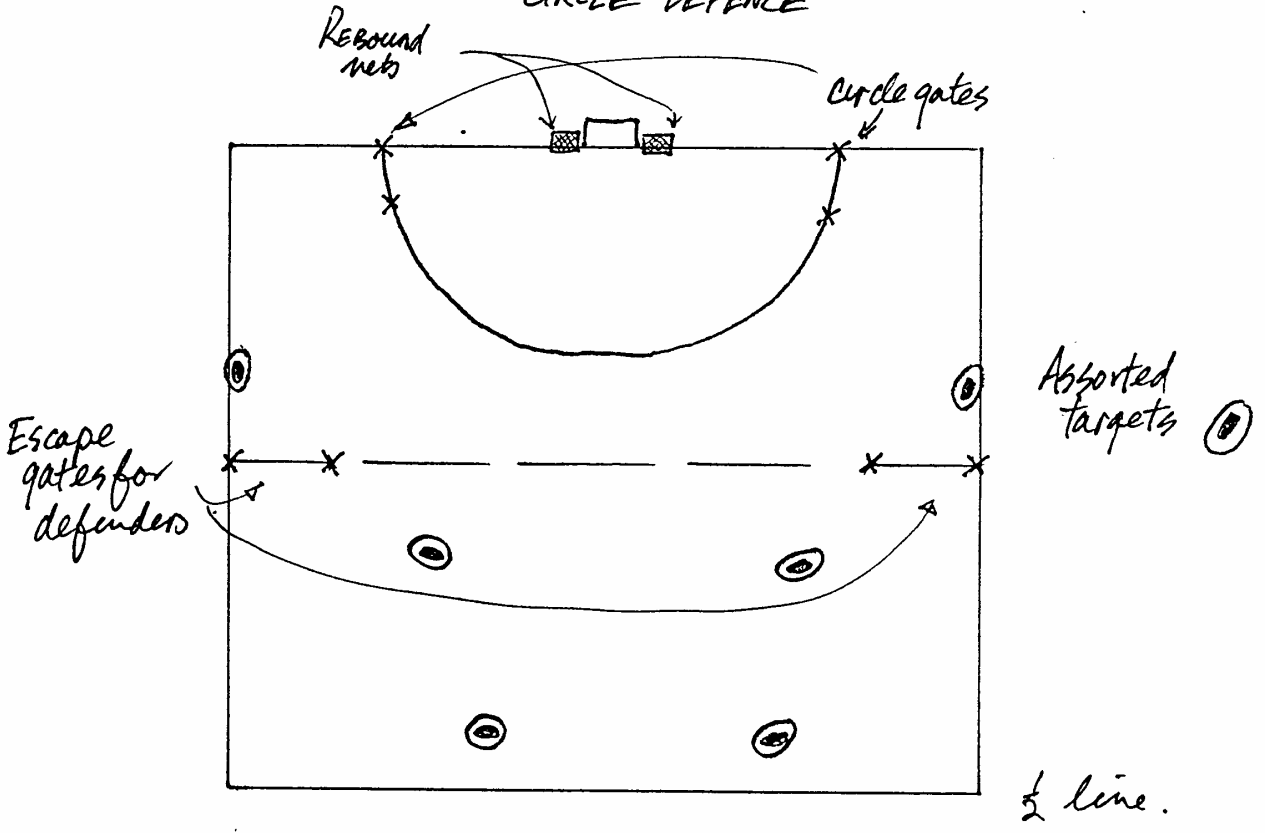
3 TEAMS



Scoring :  $\frac{1}{2}$  point for each team not scored against  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  point to team scoring in box

4

### GOAL SCORING & CIRCLE DEFENCE



#### Defenders

- Score
- escape gates 1 pt.
  - target  $\frac{1}{2}$  pt.
  - o'head  $\rightarrow$   $\frac{1}{2}$  line 1 pt.

#### Attackers

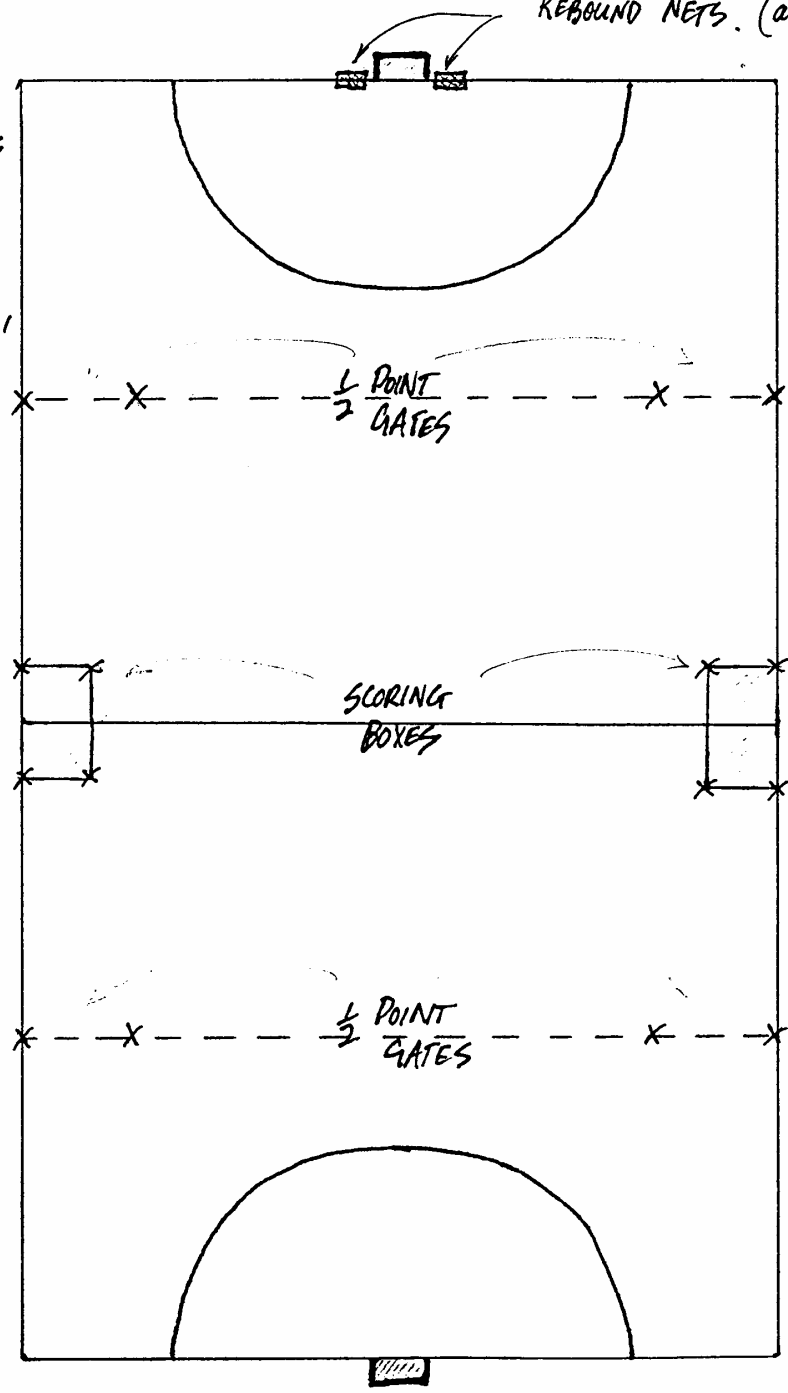
- Score
- goal 1 pt.
  - circle gate  $\frac{1}{2}$  pt.
  - S. corner  $\frac{1}{2}$  pt.
  - conversion  $\frac{1}{2}$  pt.

5

# FULL-FIELD

REBOUND NETS. (also possible)

Scoring  
1/2 pt thro' gates  
1/2 pt score box  
1 pt goal  
2 pt goal after passage thro' gates.



score if 3 pas. in the box by opp. contact